



PRINTERS NEWS

■ CONVERTIBLE LASER

Epson's innovative mono laser printer, also called the 2600N, lets you switch from black and white to colour and back again. The AcuLaser 2600N is a four-pass device with quoted speeds of 30 pages per minute (ppm) in mono and 7.5ppm in colour. Billed as a 'convertible' colour laser, this AcuLaser printer can switch between a colour mode that uses black, cyan, magenta and yellow toners, and a mono mode, where the colour toners can be removed or replaced with extra black toners. When all four slots have black supplies, it can produce 20,000 mono pages without restocking.



■ KYOCERA MITA LASERS ECOLOGICALLY SOUND

Tests by a German laboratory recently gave a boost to Kyocera Mita's ecological credentials. Druckerchannel.de tested four workgroup laser printers over a six-month period, printing a total of more than 1.2 million pages between them. Kyocera Mita's FS-3830N was named best overall performer, managing to beat competition from HP, Lexmark and Ricoh. Tests measured the amount of waste each printer produced in printing more than 300,000 pages. The FS-3830N produced the least with 4kg of waste; the competition produced between 20.2kg and 38.4kg of waste.

REVIEW COLOUR LASER PRINTER

HP LaserJet 2600N

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £252 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.hp.co.uk



We haven't seen a printer quite like HP's 2600N before. It costs about the same as other entry-level colour lasers, but it has a network interface and LCD control panel as standard.

This colour laser printer doesn't use the four-pass technology we'd expect at this price, either. Both colour and mono pages are created in a single pass, though at the rate of just eight per minute. In mono, this makes the 2600N the slowest laser we've seen for some time. Even the most basic black-only printers can manage 12ppm, and entry-level colour devices normally reach 18ppm or above. HP's unusual approach is designed to deliver prints at high speeds, however. Here the 2600N keeps pace with the very quickest four-pass lasers.

The 2600N seems to be an easy printer to live with, requiring little more desk space than the mono Samsung laser reviewed opposite. It successfully leased an IP address on our Labs network, and HP's setup program detected and configured it without incident. Paper takes a straight path into a 125-sheet output tray from the 250-sheet input cassette or manual feed. There is no rotating carousel, either, so it's exceptionally quiet while it's printing.

Eight pages per minute seems remarkably slow these days. Our 50-page mono tests each took nearly six and a half minutes, sauntering into the 2600N's output tray at 7.8ppm. In colour, the longer spool times for our complex 24-page document reduced the 2600N to just 6.2ppm, but this is still ahead of its best entry-level competitors.



The HP's print quality is fine, with excellent mono text. Its vibrant colour output is suited to business presentations, but our test photographs were grainy with inaccurate colours. None of the colour settings cured this or could stop a couple of images being printed with curious blemishes.

The 2600N uses new consumables that weren't widely available as we went to press. HP was keen to stress that its guide figures hadn't yet been finalised, but using them we calculated that pages should cost 2.3p in mono or 9.5p in colour. This is a little higher than the competition, but we'd expect to see both prices fall in time.

Given the 2600N's slow mono printing speeds, most users may want to pay more for a network-ready four-pass competitor. Still, this laser is very good value if you need a quick and robust colour printer for a small business network.

Simon Handby

✓ Great value; fast in colour; quiet, durable and easy to set up

✗ Slow mono printing; not great for photos

SPECIFICATIONS Colour laser, 600dpi, 8ppm mono/colour maximum speed, USB Hi-Speed and 10/100 Ethernet interfaces. **Part code** Q6455A

HOTLIST LASER PRINTER

DELL 1700

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £135 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Dell 08701 524699

DETAILS www.dell.co.uk



Dell's large and boxy 1700 manages to combine decent print quality and high speed with low running costs. It takes a while to spool print jobs and its maximum 1,200dpi resolution goes at only half its top speed, but it is rugged, cheap to upgrade and has no significant weaknesses.



SPECIFICATIONS Mono laser, 1,200x1,200dpi, 24ppm, USB and parallel interfaces. **E-Value code** 305-1700

HOTLIST COLOUR LASER PRINTER

EPSON AcuLaser C1100

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £229 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.misco.co.uk

DETAILS www.epson.co.uk



Epson's C1100 is reasonably large for a four-pass colour laser and it's more tricky than many to set up. In our tests it came commendably close to Epson's claimed speeds, but the most welcome discovery was its superb all-round print quality. This is an excellent, inexpensive printer with reasonable running costs.



SPECIFICATIONS Colour laser, 600dpi, 25ppm mono/5ppm colour maximum speed, USB Hi-Speed interface. **Part code** C11C567001

HOTLIST MULTIFUNCTION PERIPHERAL

HP Photosmart 2610

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £182 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.misco.co.uk

DETAILS www.hp.co.uk



This MFP is a great all-rounder. Its scanner has no automatic document feeder, but it's fast and delivers good results. Text printing is quick, and affordable at 2.2p per page. Print and copy quality is excellent. At this price, its network port and built-in fax make it a bargain.



SPECIFICATIONS 4,800x1,200dpi print resolution, 2,400x4,800dpi scan resolution, USB, Wired 10/100 Ethernet and PictBridge USB interfaces. **Part code** Q5542B

REVIEW LASER PRINTER

SAMSUNG ML-2250

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £93 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.samsung.co.uk


Samsung's ML-2250 is iPod-white, which makes a pleasant change from the drab beige favoured by many peripheral manufacturers. It's bigger than many entry-level mono lasers and looks particularly straight-edged.

The ML-2250 takes a single 5,000-page-rated consumable, which combines toner and an imaging drum. It's easy to install the full-capacity unit that Samsung supplies. You could print 10 reams of paper before it needs replacing, after which each page should cost just 1.33p.

With 16MB of memory, PCL emulation and a 250-sheet input cassette, the Samsung is quite well specified, but several upgrades are available. Networking or PostScript language support can be added, the printer's memory can be upgraded to a 144MB maximum and its paper input can be doubled with a second cassette. No duplex unit is available, but the driver offers support if you need to print on two sides manually.

Setup is straightforward, but the Custom option allows you to install a PostScript driver. Attempting to print using this option spews out pages of raw data, though; it would be better if it only came with the PostScript upgrade.

This printer beat its quoted speed in both our 50-page document tests, reaching 20.3 pages per minute (ppm) in each. It delivered all 24 pages of our mixed-colour test at an impressive 18.5ppm. When ready to print, the first page of a mono print job appeared in 11 seconds, but this test took 42 seconds when repeated from power-saving mode.

Text and mono graphics quality was very high at the default 600dpi setting. Switching to 1,200dpi graphics increased the spool times for each job, but didn't halve print engine speed as with some lasers. Text printed at this resolution was exceptional. Test photos were fine, let down only by slightly uneven shading in areas that should have been uniform.

The printer isn't intrusively loud, but paper made an unusual soft crumpling noise as it passed through the final output rollers of our test unit. This didn't crease it, though, and it accumulated neatly in the 125-sheet output tray. Envelopes fed from the 50-sheet multipurpose tray were also left unruffled.

The ML-2250 is affordable to buy and run, and has no real failings. Had it arrived in time for last month's *Labs* test of mono laser printers, it would have been our Best Buy.

Simon Handby

✓ Fast, high quality and good value; low running costs

✗ Slow first page from standby

SPECIFICATIONS Mono laser, 1,200dpi, 20ppm maximum speed, USB Hi-Speed interface. **Part code** ML-2250/XEU

HOTLIST INKJET PRINTER

CANON PIXMA iP1500

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £37 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk


The iP1500 is the baby of Canon's PIXMA range and does without the advanced paper handling of the more expensive models. It's a great little printer, though, producing excellent text and good photographs quickly. It's the best affordable inkjet we've tested, but like other budget devices it's not cheap to run.

SPECIFICATIONS Four-colour inkjet, 4,800x1,200dpi maximum resolution, USB interface. **Part code** 9319A011AA

HOTLIST MULTIFUNCTION PERIPHERAL

HP PSC 1215

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £59 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.hp.co.uk


This small and stylish multifunction peripheral would suit anyone who is short of money or space. It has a fairly basic driver and comes with limited but useful software. Copies, scans and prints are all very high-quality, but printing is fairly slow. Running costs are low at 2.7p per mono and 4.7p per colour page. Advanced users might not be satisfied by its simplicity, but beginners will love it.

SPECIFICATIONS 4,800x1,200dpi print resolution, 600x2,400dpi scan resolution, USB interface. **Part code** Q5894A

BYTE SIZE!



Our round-up of the best new gadgets and software

PHILIPS SPC 600NC

RATING ★★★

PRICE Approx £40 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.philips.co.uk


This webcam is aimed at gaming or video-chat use. It can capture images at a resolution of 800x600, and video at up to 30 frames per second (fps). Tiny microphones either side of its white activity LED record stereo sound. There's no facility to mount the camera on a monitor, but removing it from its base reveals a useful USB port. Captured stills had minimal pixilation and videos showed little blurring. The dimly lit conditions typical of the average gamer's bedroom didn't introduce too much noise to the camera's output. Auto-exposure and white balance were both fine, if a little slow to react to sudden changes in lighting. This is a decent webcam, but we've seen equally impressive models that cost less.

Simon Handby

SCYTHE Silent Box

RATING ★★★

PRICE £41 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.quietpc.co.uk
DETAILS www.scythe.co.jp/en


It's possible to obsess about PC noise. Installing quiet case fans and swapping stock coolers with low-noise alternatives produce the best improvements. However, if you've addressed fan racket you may need the Silent Box, a dense rubber and foam housing for a single 3½" hard disk. Heat from the enclosed drive is conducted into an aluminium plate and lost through radiation. The assembled product mounts in a 5¼ bay, though it's deeper than an optical drive. We installed a 7,200rpm SATA disk, which stayed below 48°C when defragmenting. The drive wasn't silenced, but sound and vibration were tamed, making this ideal for the noise-obsessed.

Simon Handby



REVIEW COLOUR LASER PRINTER

CANON
Laser Shot LBP5200

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £224 inc VAT

SUPPLIER <http://uk.insight.com>DETAILS www.canon.co.uk

While the LaserJet 2600N reviewed on page 28 is an unconventional printer, Canon's Laser Shot LBP5200 is exactly what we would expect from an entry-level colour laser: it's a large and heavy four-pass device, with a minimal control panel and no network interface.

Having said that, an ordinary specification doesn't necessarily make a printer inferior. Canon's conventional approach has produced a very affordable product. Its quoted speeds of 19 pages per minute (ppm) mono and 4ppm in colour are a touch adrift from some of the entry-level competition, but in mono at least it should comfortably outpace the HP.

The Laser Shot is shipped without its toners in place, so the first job is to remove some shipping locks and install them. Each colour slots neatly into the printer's carousel, but a button press is required to rotate it in between them. A few other shipping locks must be removed before the printer is ready, leaving you with enough orange plastic to start a children's toy company.

Budget colour lasers often have no paper cassette, and Canon doesn't fit one to the Laser Shot. Its 150-sheet all-purpose tray is adequate for light use, but it isn't ideal as it leaves paper exposed to dust and other elements. You'll need to unload the plain paper supply if you want to print envelopes, but the Canon doesn't crumple them.

When first switched on, the Laser Shot takes a couple of minutes to whirr and clunk before it's ready for its first print. It's quicker from standby,



though, and we timed the first mono page out at 20 seconds. Our colour document seemed to take a long time to spool, but the printer still despatched it at 3.8ppm, which is a decent performance for a budget device.

Printing in mono, the LBP5200 was a little further from its quoted speeds. Its 16.3ppm in our 50-page tests wasn't too bad, but Epson's AcuLaser C1100 (see *Hotlist*, page 28) was 7.5ppm quicker. Prints from the Canon were almost a match for the AcuLaser's high quality, but comparatively inaccurate colour in photographs let them down.

The Laser Shot is a sound and affordable colour laser with reasonable running costs. It's up against fierce competition though, some of which come with such features as automatic double-sided printing and network ports. Epson's C1100 has neither, but its superior print quality and speed edge this printer out of contention.

Simon Handby



Very good print quality; good value



A little slow in mono; limited paper input

SPECIFICATIONS Colour laser, 600dpi, 19ppm mono/4ppm colour maximum speed, USB Hi-Speed interface. **Part code** 9631A006AA

CHOOSING A...

MULTI
FUNCTION
PERIPHERAL

A multifunction peripheral combines a printer and scanner into a single unit, and also provides copying and fax facilities. This saves desk space and also money, compared with buying two or more separate devices.

1

Basic models cost as little as £65, with specs similar to those shown in grey below. These are OK if funds and space are tight, but quality and speed will be basic, and copying and faxing won't be possible without the help of the PC

2

Spending more invariably gives you improved speed and image quality. These improvements aren't directly proportional to price, though, so read our reviews for details. Remember that running costs can outweigh the price of the unit.

3

Sheet-fed scanners handle multiple pages but flatbeds tend to give better image quality. Cheaper models make you choose one or the other, while pricier units combine both features.

4

If you'll be using the printer regularly, consider a laser rather than an inkjet model. These benefit from improved print speeds and lower running costs, and cost from around £160. You'll need to spend a lot more for a colour laser-based machine.

5

To make the most of the standalone functions, you'll want decent front-panel controls. These can vary from a single copy button to something resembling a dedicated copier. If fax is important, check that the device has a built-in modem.

6

Other useful extras to consider are memory card slots, duplexing units for the printer and/or scanner, additional paper trays and an Ethernet port to connect the device over a network.

FILL IN YOUR SPECS HERE
(Recommended minimum in grey)

PRINT TECHNOLOGY: Inkjet
PRINT RESOLUTION: 4,800x1,200dpi
SCAN RESOLUTION: 600x2,400dpi
INTERFACE: USB
EXTRAS:

HOTLIST INKJET PRINTER

HP
Photosmart 8150

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £124 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.hp.co.uk

This printer uses HP's new ink cartridges and comes with six-ink printing as standard. The optional black cartridge printed draft text at 17½ ppm.

This printer excels with photos, though, and it produces natural-looking prints with accurate colours. Best of all, it is equipped with PictBridge and memory card support, and has superb direct printing features.



SPECIFICATIONS Six-colour inkjet, 1,200x4,800dpi maximum resolution, USB and PictBridge interfaces. **Part code** Q3399B

HOTLIST INKJET PRINTER

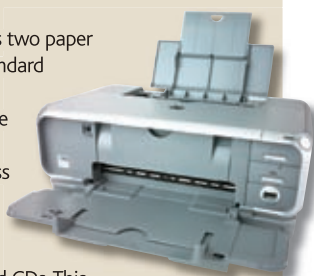
CANON
PIXMA iP3000

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £67 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.savastore.comDETAILS www.canon.co.uk

The iP3000 has two paper input trays, standard duplex printing and a PictBridge USB port. It prints borderless A4 photos and can even print on specially coated CDs. This is an impressive and unique set of abilities for the price, and yet it's also quick, cheap to run and has high print quality.



SPECIFICATIONS Four-colour inkjet, 1,200x4,800dpi maximum resolution, USB and PictBridge interfaces. **Part code** 9316A011AA